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ABSTRACT

The three papers collected in this document present opinions for and against the use of anthologies in introductory writing and literature classes at community colleges. The first paper, "College Students Must Read Book-Length Works," by Dallas E. Dillon, proposes that students, even non-traditional community college students, should be pushed to read full-length books; that anthologies serve the interests of publishing houses rather than readers; and that excerpts from works do not give students the full meaning of the work. The second paper, "Voices, Voices, Voices: A Case for Anthologies in the College Curriculum," by Vince Piro, argues that anthologies offer students a variety of voices that differ from their own ethnic group, age, or gender and which they may not have encountered in any other forum. This paper also reviews specific contributions anthologies have made to ethnic identification, gender and sexual identity, literary schools, geographic identity, and radical points of view. The final paper, "Choosing Texts: Some Complexities and an Exhortation," by Mark Nicoll-Johnson, reviews problems involved in using full-length texts, including pressure from cost-conscious administrators and assigning whole books to students who have never read an entire book, but suggests, however, that their use can stimulate humanistic inquiry, reflection, and ultimately empowerment for students. Each paper contains references. (BCY)

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Anthologies in the College Curriculum: A Pro and Con Debate

Dallas E. Dillon
Vince Piro
Mark Nicoll-Johnson

Paper presnted at the English Council of California Two Year Colleges Statewide Conference (San Francisco, CA, Oct. 16-18, 1997)

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College Students Must Read Book-Length Works

This panel discussion is listed in your programs as pro and con arguments concerning the uses of anthologies in introductory writing and literature classes. The three of us on this panel have, of course, assigned collections of shorter works as well as primary texts of novel length in any given English course. My seventeen years of teaching experiences at a number of community colleges have brought me to the conclusion that the best way to offer an education to traditional or non-traditional students includes assigning a number of books--paperback books untouched by the textbook publishing trade or wrapped up in a single mass-marketed package.

I would like to begin my series of justifications for this radical departure of automatonic conditioning by relating an anecdote. This story is quite brief, in fact, and not too profound, but a point of reckoning of sorts--perhaps an epiphany regarding a somewhat inconsequential matter. One day in my office a student (perhaps the ten thousandth student who traveled to my office with this particular"problem") lamented the imminent: She could not become enthused about writing, about reading, about studying, about thinking, about putting it all together, man. I am one who is or was willing to try all the new angles, all the tricks of the trade. I've assigned writing assignments that "related to students' lives," introduced free writing, encouraged peer critiquing, and demonstrated that freshmen in college should "discover their voices." I have no problem with these sentiments, by the way. However, what struck me on this fateful day--and I suspect that the light had been blinking for several years--hit me clearly for whatever reason. I looked at this student who recited the usual contemporary funk, and then I thought, "What this person needs is an education." She doesn't need nurturing, and she doesn't need me to make excuses for her; she makes her own quite willingly and relentlessly. She doesn't need a watered-down version of ideas or a Readers Digest version of intellectual inquiries. "This student, like all students, needs an education," I said to myself. Fortunately (for me, anyway), I was willing and able to accommodate her and all who followed her into my classrooms from that time forward.

I suspect that what bothers many people, especially instructors, about the "classical education" approach to classes at the junior colleges is that these people assume that the junior college student cannot handle tasks such as reading books and, consequently, writing essays based on the ideas or issues one identifies in a book. My attitude toward today's college students might at times reach dangerous levels of sarcasm or pessimism; nevertheless, my job is to offer an education. I have always believed that grading someone on his or her"writing ability" presented a far too slippery or abstract image, especially if the writing assignments asked for personal opinions on big issues such as family members, gangs, capital punishment, dating, and so on. On the other hand, if assignments are "text-driven," I have something to write

in the margins of the student essay. Assignments based on matters from books afford student-instructor "conversations," in other words. I think that many junior college students can read the assignments and write the papers that I assign. In effect, my attitude toward the junior college student is not so patronizing as the popular attitudes that call for protecting and isolating students from college work.

What role do anthologies play in my discussion here? I find that anthologies are far more symptomatic (viral, perhaps) than eligible for scapegoat status concerning the state of mediocrity in English studies. I find that the conditioned response to textbook selection indicates an ill tendency in our profession. In short, anthologies serve as safe ground for the unimaginative, the lazy, and the under-educated.

I would like to outline a few answers to questions that I have learned to anticipate from anthology users:

1. What is my problem, exactly, with anthologies? Because of time constraints I will limit myself to one problem, which is that anthologies serve the publishing house more than a reader. A college education, like it or not, demands that one reads what one"should" read. It is difficult to argue against the phenomenon that certain books prepare one for any number of tasks in higher education, so why should we ignore this matter? I assign books that freshmen and sophomores read all over the country. Am I of any service to California community college students if I pass them through my course as underprepared as they were when they entered?

2. Don't some anthologies include important works? Actually, an anthology with a few widely-read essays isn't so rare. One anthology is the essentially the same as any other regarding this particular matter. I resent being asked to review anthologies; why not close my eyes and point? Furthermore, I have not found an anthology that includes a novel or the whole of a full-length book of non fiction. What do I accomplish when I assign five pages from The Social Contract or only the Judith Shakespeare passage from A Room of One's Own? It is ridiculous to rationalize that "at least the student receives an introduction to a number of authors." A student should read the books in their entirety and demonstrate that they can provide thoughtful discourse upon the ideas and arguments inside the full range (cover to cover) of the text.

3. Literary anthologies offer a number of poems, short stories, and a couple of plays. Isn't this kind of collection good enough for introductory literature students? No. Again, what we are too dependent upon is the service course model: "Here are some morsels for you. Try to identify the characteristics of these genres." Who says that the New Critics found the recipe to literary study? If one wants to understand poetry, one reads a book of poems in which the author very purposely published the poems in the single volume to demonstrate the nature of how poems work. Ask a poet about this. It is difficult to decide which book(s) to assign, but one must trust his or her

educations and experiences in this matter. People hired us because we possess certain areas of expertise. Also, I have not spoken to many who do not grow bored with the few selections"worth" using in class. Among the problems here is that much of the textbook is not in use. I suggest that about 400 to 500 pages of any given anthology are left unread at semester's end.

4. What about cost to the student? Anthologies for literature and writing courses run approximately forty dollars. Seven paperback books should not cost much more. In fact, if I search carefully, the cost for seven or even eight paperbacks total less than forty dollars. On a slightly related note, I sometimes see one of my students reading his or her book in places all around campus--and why not? The book is portable; one can whip it out of a pocket or handbag and read it while relaxing on a bench or sitting in the cafeteria. I never see someone thumbing through a heavy "reader" anywhere, not even in the library.

5. Can one assume that students will actually read books? The students who complete any assignments will read books in a writing class, a literature class, or any other class. Obviously, some students are intimidated by a reading list. I have heard from many students that they had not read a book, not even in high school. Those who admit such a fact also claim that they are glad that it finally became necessary to read a book, as the experience gave them a sense of accomplishment, and so on. Some students drop because they do not want to deal with being students. Fine. On the other hand, I can sense that some students genuinely feel left out in class discussions led by those who read the assignments. Some of these who were"left out" bring the book and try to take part in the next session. All in all, I like the idea that college classes assume the appearance and identity of a college class. Whole original texts play an important role in dressing up the scene, so to speak.

My colleague Mr. Piro will attempt to identify some of the salient qualities of anthologies next. Perhaps I will agree with some of his comments, but the truly usable anthology does not exist. Rather than depend upon the montage approach to issues and ideas, I can develop a theme for the course and prepare a reading list that offers the students something relatively close to a classical education. A good education worked for me, and it can work for Merced College students if I remain firm in administering a college-level course.

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Voices, Voices, Voices:

A Case for Anthologies in the College Curriculum

College essay and literature anthologies are often accused of creating cafeteria style reading habits in our students: they read a little bit of everything, but not enough of anything to really get a taste for it. I would, however, argue that while the cafeteria metaphor is correct to describe our students' reading habits, we should turn to the cafeteria dining room for our image, where students are clustered in small groups according to race, social position, or gender, and insulated from all other groups. Students often read the same way: they read books in one genre (horror stories, for example), by one author (usually Stephen King), and for one purpose (to escape every day reality). Furthermore, while many students will read works by mainstream, contemporary, popular authors, students will rarely read obviously ethnic literature on their own ("It's a book about Hispanic boy; I won't relate to it."), books by authors before the 1980's ("Why would I want to read that old guy?") or books by authors from the opposite gender ("That's a chick book."). What anthologies offer students, and readers in general, is a variety of voices which they may not have read before, voices different from their own, their own ethnic group, their own age group favorites, their own gender. In fact, anthologies--both in college and in society--have played an important role in establishing "the voices" of particular communities as well as recognizing the voices of others.

Anthologies and Ethnic Identification

Anthologies have often been used to establish a particular cultural or ethnic group's literary identity. These selections can later become canons in their own rights. For example, in the last three decades, several editors have tried to establish an African-American literary canon that best exemplifies African-American experience and

literature. The editors see the purposes of these anthologies as various; however, two common purposes do unite them. First, the editors wish to legitimize a literary history they feel has been forgotten or neglected by establishing the major voices of African-American literary culture. Second, they wanted to gain recognition of this rich literary tradition by the mainstream, literary establishment and reading public.

For instance, in Black Voices, a 1968 anthology, Abraham Chapman begins by writing, "The Africans torn away from their native languages and cultures and transported to colonial America began to use English as a written language as a literary expression more than 220 years ago " (23). Then for several pages, he recounts African-American literary history from Afro-American folk literature to slave narratives to the prose and poetry of the 1960's, placing it firmly within the context of American literary history. Concerned that "very much of the literature created by black American writers in the twentieth century is unknown to the general reading public and little known even to students of American literature" (25), he presents prose and poetry by late nineteenth and twentieth century writers in categories designed, I feel, to legitimize this literature in the eyes of modern, educated readers: Fiction, Autobiography, Poetry, and Literary Criticism. As he states, "Before any meaningful debate can take place on conflicting critical approaches and interpretations and on analyses of distinctive forms, structures, images, themes, the literature itself will have to become better known. All too often, and for far too long, it has been a spurned or neglected part of our literary heritage" (25). Chapman's concerns and efforts have been duplicated by such notable authors and critics as Dudley Randell, Henry Louis Gates, Demetrice A. Worley and Jesse Perry, Jr., a former president of the National Council of Teachers of English, all with purpose of assuring that "the validity of African-American literature, like the rights of African-Americans as individuals and citizens of this country, cannot be denied" (Worley & Perry xxiv).

Several Asian-American and Hispanic-American editors have created anthologies of ethnic literature with the very same purposes of establishing an ethnic literary identity and of presenting the literature to the mainstream reading public. In Aiiieeeee!: an Anthology of Asian-American Writers, a 1974 anthology, the editors note that

> Seven generations of suppression under legislative racism and euphismized white racist love have left today's Asian-Americans in a state of self-contempt, self-rejection, and disintegration. . . . [However], the age, variety, depth, and quality of the writing collected here proves the existence of Asian-American sensibilities and cultures that might be relate to but are distinct from Asia and white America. (Chin, et. al. viii)

The editors of The Hawk's Well, a 1986 anthology of Japanese-American literature, argue that ". . . the United States has ignored the creative systems of Asian-Americans for over 150 years. It wasn't because they could not, or did not write . . . [This anthology's] primary aim is to introduce Japanese-American artist and writers through a significant body of their work . . ." (Hiura 10 & 23). Similarly, Ray Gonzalez in Currents from the Dancing River: Contemporary Latino Fiction, Nonfiction, and Poetry, a 1994 anthology, claims that " The work in this present volume showcases Latino literature for the largest audience it has ever had through writing that preserves cultural and familial traditions, and although clearly rooted on the American continent, recognizes as well the historical clash of cultures" (xiv).

Anthologies, Gender and Sexual Identity

Of course, many editors have also created anthologies based on gender for many of the same reasons as editors of ethnic anthologies. Ignored and often suppressed by mainstream literary circles, women's literature has been "re-discovered" and legitimized in many educational institutions because of a re-energized feminist movement taking place around the globe and in this country over the last 4 decades. Sandra Gilbert and

Susan Gubar in the Norton Anthology of Literature by Women, an anthology first edited in 1985, argue that they have created an anthology of over 2000 pages because

> no single anthology has represented the exuberant variety yet strong continuity of the literature that English-speaking women have produced between the fourteenth century and the present. In the Norton Anthology of Literature by Women, we are attempting to do just that. . . . Our collection seeks to recover a long and often neglected literary history. (xxvii)

In Daughters of Africa, a1992 anthology of women of African descent from around the world, Margaret Busby argues that women writers of African descent create a unique literary community worthy of study in its own right but too often ignored. She notes her purpose: ". . . my aim was to show the immense range, in terms of genre, country of origin, style, that a category such as 'women writers of African descent' encompasses . . . I prefer to see it as a contribution to the cause of reclaiming for women of African descent a place in literary history" (xxx). In the introduction, Busby illustrates several themes common to women of African descent found internationally.

In Other Fires: Short Fiction by Latin American Women, Alberto Manguel notes a familiar concern among editors of anthologies: "Their [the women writers in this book] interests, styles, points of view, are so different that the only justification for their inclusion in the same book has been that their excellence, up to now, has been neglected in Europe and North America" (3). Manguel further deplores that Latin American literature "has become identified almost exclusively with writers who happen to be male" (4) even though two of the most influential literary figures in Latin American have been women, Sister Juana Ines de la Cruz and Victoria Ocampo. His anthology is an attempt to correct these injustices.

Anthologies and Literary Schools

Anthologies are often used to establish and expand literary schools in the eyes of the mainstream reading public. Ann Charters, editor of The Portable Beat Reader, explains schools of literature this way: "As a facet of our country's cultural history, clusters have been an outstanding feature of our literature. They can be groups of writers joined by a common geographical location who share philosophical sympathies . . . More often the writers share a temporal rather than spatial proximity along with their literary aesthetic" (xv). She then proceeds to anthologize not only the expected and well-known Beat writers, but others who "after the publication of Howl and On the Road. . . . aligned themselves with the Beats," such as, Bob Dylan and Amiri Baraka (331). These writers later established individual identities separate from the Beat movement. By anthologizing these "fellow travelers" (331), Charters expands the sphere of influence of the Beat movement with the publication of The Portable Beat Reader.

Anthologies and Geographic Identity

Anthology editors have also tried to establish geographic literary identities. By selecting representative authors from a particular region editors often try to fulfill the twin tasks of representing a region's diversity while at the same time establishing common characteristics that establish the region's literary identity. In Highway 99, Stan Yoshi brings together such diverse voices as William Saroyan, Luis Valdez, Ernest Finney, and David Mas Masamoto. However, he is able to establish themes that resonate with the people of the valley, such as, farming and farm labor, landscape, family, and the immigrant experience.

Anthologies and Radical Voices

Anthologies often preserve radical voices lost in mainstream history books and cultural perspectives. In Voices Against Tyranny, John Miller collects the writing of the Spanish Civil War, a collection of literature protesting the facist invasion of Franco. He collects the forgotten protests of W.H Auden, William Carlos Williams, Thomas Mann, Pablo Neruda, and other notables in an effort to preserve the radical voices of writers now considered part of the mainstream canon.

In The New Family, a 1991 Graywolf anthology, Scott Walker presents a collection of stories that offers an alternative to "the traditional family." As he writes, "The traditional family--Ozzie and Harriet--is a myth, and has the resonant truth of a myth; as the family evolves and recreates itself, the mythic power of the Ozzie and Harriet family continues to have a forceful impact on our lives. Families have, in fact, changed" (3). His collection of stories presents "'the New Family,' families with divorce, step-parenting, gay and lesbian parents, single parenthood, geographical dispersion and much more" (4). He hopes that his readers "will find artful fiction to be a rough guide through the thickets of choices and comparisons" (4). The stories collected here act as radical reminders of what is real and what is myth.

Anthologies and Our Students

How then can anthologies be useful in community college classrooms? First of all, anthologies offer our students, who often have limited literary experiences, an opportunity to establish a sense of the range, diversity, and unity found in the literature of certain groups. As we know, too many of our students have not read much and, therefore, have a very limited idea of the literary heritages of our country. With such limitations, they find it nearly impossible to place any single piece within a meaningful context. While I certainly favor the study of certain pieces in depth, I feel that breadth in reading also makes one a more intelligent reader.

Furthermore, anthologies can be used as reference points while reading full novels and other texts. For example, in my introduction to literature course at Merced College, I use Stan Yoshi's fine anthology, Highway 99, a collection of California Central Valley literature, throughout the semester to help my students find local literature with which they can identify and with which they can compare and contrast writers from other locales. They have been able to make connections between such diverse authors as Luiz Valdez and Emile Zola. I feel their appreciation of Zola came in large part because they first established a connection with the local California author. In this sense, I use anthologies as points of departure, not as destinations, as suggested by Jackie Swenson in her English Journal article.

Third, the whole editing and anthologizing process can be another fruitful area of literary study. In my early American literature class, we have compared the tables of contents of several anthologies, analyzing their similarities and differences. Several discussion have taken place over the differences and similarities between the Heath Anthology of American Literature, our class text, and many of its rivals, such as The Norton Anthology of American Literature. I have even gone so far as to offer the class critical reviews of these anthologies to give them "the insiders" debate over the creation of literary canons.

Another critical exercise along these same lines involve comparing the table of contents of a single anthology over several editions or comparing early anthologies of a certain culture with more modern ones. This can be done by searching the shelves of your own family's personal library or institutional libraries. Obviously, the pieces chosen to be anthologized in each volume reflect something of the literary history and tastes during the time frame they were printed. Anthologies of American literature published in the last decade or two certainly are more inclusive of women and "minority" writers than anthologies from earlier in the century. It is also interesting to see how the contents have changed in anthologies devoted to particular ethnic groups. Modern anthologies of

Hispanic literature have taken a deliberate turn away from more radical voices, represented in many 1960's and 70's anthologies. As Gary Soto notes in his anthology Pieces of the Heart:

> As I see it, it's the late 1970s when much of the movimiento, the Chicano movement, has lost ground, both in the community and in the university . . . These writers [in Pieces of the Heart], all in their mid or late twenties, pulled back . . . Or perhaps, they never put forward an obvious political commitment because the writing life of the 1970s was not a public life. (vii)

Anthologies often establish a canon of what it means to be well read. That's why we must be sure they are inclusive of different voices rather than exclusive, promoting only one voice or point of view. I feel that many current anthologies, such as the Heath Anthology of American Literature, offer a rich diversity of voices. It offers the traditional canon, such as Bradford, Bradstreet, Emerson, Thoreau, etc., and pieces not traditionally anthologized and not readily available to most students, such as, La Llorna, the famous Hispanic oral take; a version of the story of the Virgin of Guadeloupe; Talk Concerning the First Beginnings, a Zuni emergence tale; and various Patriot and Loyalist songs from the revolution. Students are able to compare and contrast such works, gaining fruitful insights into the literature of early America. For example, they can contrast the descriptions of Merrymont, Thomas Morton's settlement, found in Bradford's Of Plymouth Plantation with Morton's own account of the times. They can contrast Zuni emergence myths with their own accounts of Genesis.

While I do believe that whole texts should be read and taught in literature and compositions courses, I feel there is still a place and use for anthologies in the college classroom.

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Choosing Texts:

Some Complexities and an Exhortation

The pressure not to use books in classrooms is immense. Their irrelevance is trumpeted in the marketplace. Our administrators often, in their enthusiasm for applying the standards of business to the enterprise of education, seem to discount the value of fundamental intellectual activity. Concerned with meeting their budget while forging the cutting edge of higher education by giving student customers what they think these consumers of educational services want or expect in the form of vocational training, administrators, I think, view critical reading of the humanistic variety as a nuisance. Is it any wonder our students often would prefer not to have to read books?

Critical reading of challenging texts has received less attention than it deserves since the beginnings of the "writing crisis" in the 1970's. When, after twelve or fifteen years of teaching writing in a virtual vacuum, it was discovered by someone who had read one too many vapid student-experience based papers that students could not think, the response was to declare a critical thinking crisis and insist, statewide, on a critical thinking component in composition courses (as if it were possible to teach writing without teaching critical thinking, which, evidently it is, I guess), and at many instutions, to shift the emphasis in the second semester of first year composition away from literature to courses in critical thinking and writing,

where texts pose problems about which students are to "think critically." Perhaps unwittingly, working with the assumption that everyone can read, we have with the best of intentions shot ourselves in the foot by teaching writing in isolation from reading.

Like my colleagues Dallas Dillon and Vince Piro, I teach a variety of composition courses at Merced College, where I have worked since 1990. My assignment generally includes two sections of what we call English 84, Basic Writing II, technically two semesters below college composition, and some combination of English A, English 1A and an occasional 1B. Before finding full-time work at Merced, I taught part-time at Modesto Junior College, CSU, Stanislaus, and as a TA at UC, Davis, and at a couple of local high schools. In what seems now to be another lifetime, I taught in a private college-prep high school in Southern California, and before that as a TA in graduate school in Oregon. The last 17 years or so of my teaching experience have been in the Great Central Valley, and what I am about to say reflects that, for better or for worse. At this point, I can honestly say that I am not sure if my current classroom experience has much in common with what the rest of you encounter. If it does, God help us all.

The question of what sort of text one will assign in a composition (and reading) course turns very quickly into the perennial question about the nature of the course itself--service course, introduction to the world of ideas course, introduction to academic discourse course, pragmatic writing for all purposes

course, all/some/none of the above. And that discussion, given the backdrop of the changing nature of our student body, the social and economic context, the political climate, and so forth, quickly evolves into a question about the mission of the community college. The quick answer to this question is, of course, all things to all people.

I am beginning with this lengthy preface because what I want to do is imagine how one might think about putting the theories presented by Vince and Dallas into practice in a California community college classroom, and since I know none better than my own, that's where I'd like to take us.

Merced is a community of about 60,000, the metropolis of a county with a population of about 150,000. In the winter, when the canneries are closed and agricultural work is limited, unemployment reaches 20% or higher. There is no majority population, which breaks down ethnically roughly 32% Latino, 10% Asian (after Fresno, we have more Hmong than anyone; Merced College is one of two institutions of higher learning in the US to offer Hmong language instruction); 6% African-American; 44% Anglophonic-Caucasian. Sometime after the millenium, UC Merced will open and solve all our problems, but meanwhile we must decide what our writing students are going to write and, for my purposes today, what they are going to read. I am, as you might have inferred from the topic of our panel, one of those old-fashioned types who believes there is an important relationship between reading and writing and thinking, and living, for that matter.

It does not seem to me that any of the currently debated theories of writing/reading/language arts instruction is likely to work in the classrooms I visit every day. Our administrators are quick to remind us that new media technologies, such as the internet (our salvation!) will very quickly reshape everything we do in exciting new ways! despite that in Merced, for example, most of our students (30% of whom receive some form of public assistance) can barely afford textbooks, let alone computers high-powered enough to give them access to the latest excitement from Microsoft. As if that is not enough, our students, all thirty-eight per section in a composition class, ranging as they do from the sublime to the ridiculous, are a constant reminder that whatever it is we're doing is not working. So what do we do?

Many years ago, when I first began teaching, I taught almost exclusively with individual texts and a largely ancillary handbook. That's the way I was taught, and I knew no other. It was when I began teaching part-time at the community college that I discovered the "anthology" or the "rhetoric and reader," mainly because at some places they were required texts and no one had any choice. From necessity, then, I began using things like The Riverside Reader or The Little, Brown Reader (which was neither little nor brown, by the way), gave little thought to text selection since that had already been done for me, and tried to make the most of readings like Orwell's "A Hanging" or "Shooting an Elephant," Robert Brustein's "Reflections on Horror Movies," the inevitable piece by Joan Didion, and of course Swift's

"Modest Proposal"--all of this adding up, I suppose, to the late 20th century American poor person's equivalent of a liberal arts education. Through inertia, such texts became my texts of choice when I had one, until one semester it occurred to me that since my students generally did not read the short reading assignments in the various anthologies I had asked them to buy, why shouldn't I ask them to buy real books and let them not read those?

Lately, I have experimented with a variety of texts. In English 1A for several semesters I worked with the theory that since students seemed to have no context of any kind for the various readings I had been assigning, I would teach a course which created a context by reading utopian fiction from More's Utopia to Callenbach's Ecotopia, with several stops in between, and plenty of opportunity for cross curricular ventures (based on student interests) into social science, economics, life science, etc. It didn't work out too well. Now, in the same class, I am using Maasik and Solomon's California Dreams and Realities and novels by T.C. Boyle and Leonard Gardner. This is my first semester with this line-up, and the verdict is still out.

In English A, I am experimenting this semester with three texts in addition to a rhetoric: James Baldwin's Notes of a Native Son, Luis Alberto Urrea's By the Lake of Sleeping Children, and for local interest, David Mas Masumoto's Epitaph for a Peach. We are wrapping up Baldwin now, and the only member of the class who I can say with confidence is getting it is an exchange student from Japan. I am hoping that the more sensational content and simpler style of Urrea's book about poor

people in Baja California will be more congenial reading for these students.

In the developmental writing courses, we are largely still at the teaching of writing in a reading vacuum stage. As a staff, we are searching for texts appropriate for the abilities and backgrounds of our students. Presently, we use an anthology, Interactions, without notable success as far as I can tell.

Few of the students I see (including the high school graduates) have ever read an entire book. Many of those who have read a book are reluctant to admit it, or have forgotten. In my ESL teaching days, I was encouraged to use "realia" in the classes I taught--phone books, phones, food, miscellaneous everyday objects, and so on--to help build basic survival vocabularies for newly arrived refugees and other immigrants. We might think of books in a similar way for our students (sometimes these same immigrants or their children) for whom college, despite its comfortable familiarity in the community, is as strange a new world as many of them will ever encounter.
But for how much longer will books be part of the real world? We have been encouraged to prepare ourselves for the end of the world of print (though some of our students may never have entered it) since at least the time of Marshall McLuhan, and now the convergence of the internet and television makes it easy to imagine how print journalism might be supplanted by electronic newspapers and magazines in the near future. Books cannot be far behind.

The foresight of visionary communnity college and other

school administrators in this regard is evident in the widespread transformation of libraries into learning resource centers and the diversion of funds from traditional, clumsy, archaic and environmentally unfiendly paper products to sleeker, sexier technoligically sophisticated information delivery systems. For nostalgic purposes alone, I am tempted to assign them whole books to read. This, of course, is supported by the latest hands on pedagogy. In elementary school, one activity my children enjoyed was reliving for 24 hours the lives of old-fashioned sailors on one of the moored sailing ships in San Francisco's maritime museum. They learned to tie knots, rowed a longboat, hauled classmates, teachers and parents up a mast in the bosun's chair, stood watch, everything. At the very least, here in the waning days of the 20th century, reading some books could be that kind of historical reenactment. "Yes, and in the old days, they actually turned the pages . . . ."

Irony aside, I can think of one compelling reason to continue to try to use book length texts in college composition and reading courses. It is the reason presented by Earl Shorris in his recent Harper's article about the uses of the humanities. Shorris's argument is nothing new. In a nutshell, it is that humanistic inquiry, stimulated by reading, enriches and empowers (how's that for a buzzword) people--even those for whom the academic world is quite alien--, and that the key to this empowerment is reflection. It is not, of course, the reflection of one's self caught momentarily in bad light on the screen of a monitor, but that other kind of reflection which requires the

thoughtful patience that digital hot media do not encourage. Shorris argues that it is through this reflection that "the isolation of the private life end[s]" and public life begins (58). He also points out that "compared with unemployment, welfare, or prison, the humanities are a bargain" (59). Shorris's demonstration of the ability of poor people in New York City to manage difficult reading suggests that we are underestimating student abilities if we do not ask them to read texts in our composition coursed because at some level we think they are incapable of it. If other California community colleges are like the one in which I teach, the composition and reading class may be many students' only opportunity to read a book, and I do not think we can deny them this.

Work Cited

Shorris, Earl. "On the Uses of a Liberal Education." Harper's Magazine Sept. 1997: 50-59.

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